

AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA
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The following are excerpts from a letter dated January 24th from Dr. Ian Gilchrist who just recently arrived in the Congo to work among Angolan refugees on behalf of our Committee and its Emergency Relief to Angola (ERA) program. I think you will be interested in the information it contains. The communication confirms other information received about the refugee problem and contradicts the Portuguese contention that there is no such problem. We will be sending out other such information from time to time as we receive word from Dr. Gilchrist.

I got around Matadi a bit. I heard two figures for the number of refugees supposed to be in Matadi. One was 50,000, the other 22,000. I would presume a true estimate to be somewhere between. S.A.R.A. [Service d'assistance aux refugies angolais] has three nurses in Matadi, but no dispensary and none of the nurses working. The Corpo de Voluntarios has a dispensary, but it apparently is either on the wane or has ceased functioning altogether.

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On the way from Matadi we stopped at Kimpese. The Kimpese district is reported to have 25,000 inhabitants normally and 27,000 Angolan refugees.... There are two former Angolan missionary women there doing Angolan relief, but they do no outstation work. They need food most of all, are very pessimistic, and are due for furlough in July. There is a big and well-staffed hospital at Inkese near Kimpese, but I had heard that refugees could not go there because of prohibitive fees. I confirmed this while there. They apparently have a new teaching program which they are unable to operate without making substantial changes.

There are a few other small dispensaries and clinics, none of which are well staffed or stocked and all of which charge refugees prices which they cannot afford to pay.

Refugees continue to cross the border and they continue to be extremely well received by the Congolese who have pulled up their crops far too soon in order to feed the refugees, and who are themselves now becoming a most needy group. They are hungry; many have the funds to buy food, but the food is not there to buy. Only on the northeast border near Popokabaka, have I heard of any refugees returning to Angola. Apparently a group went back across the border there and were not molested by the Portuguese. I have no evidence of any coercion of refugees by MPLA or UPA and I have not met any refugees who want to go back -- they would rather starve here than be burned there. Mostly they come across in small groups, but I have heard of one whole village of 3,000 people who travelled together. Patrols were waiting for them near the border and only 50 survived the slaughter and got across into the Congo. I would gather that the terrorists control very little territory now, mostly because the bombing is so comprehensive.

Every night here in the UPA compound and in SARA dozens of refugee combatants sleep. They filter in here to receive supplies and then filter back to fight. I spoke with one patrol leader tonight who said that the Portuguese control all the

roads now and that his patrol is attacked regularly, even though they steer clear of the roadways. He added they also attack any Portuguese controls they come across and that they could easily win if they had comparable armaments.

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We usually see about 50 some odd patients each morning and then hold classes in the afternoon for students.

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.... There is an association of Angolan students here which is quite vocal, and I think represents mostly the refugees at Lovanium. Probably the most usual request from refugees (after food) is for schools.